



# Take 5

For Safety



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## To shoot or not to shoot?

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*Ever wonder what your bullet might hit if you miss while hunting?*

It was a crisp fall morning as I headed out to a large pond on post to try and bag a duck. I worked my way around the east side of the pond to a promising area. My single-shot 20-gauge lacked the range of a 12-gauge, so I needed to get close to have any chance at success.

I was just about where I wanted to be when I suddenly heard the loud crack of a high-powered rifle from across the pond. The bullet ricocheted off the water near a duck and passed within a few feet of me. Talk about an instant pucker factor!

When the shooter immediately chambered another round, I could tell by the sound it was a lever-action rifle — probably a .30-30. He took another quick shot and I ducked, once again hearing the bullet pass nearby.

Now I was angry. I raised my shotgun's muzzle and fired off a round, then quickly reloaded and fired a second shot. Since ducks don't pack shotguns, I figured the idiot would realize he'd just put another hunter in danger. I couldn't believe someone was dumb enough to try and shoot ducks with a .30-30.

He stopped firing, and I quickly worked my way back to where I'd parked on a dirt road. I got to a phone and called the provost marshal's office, hoping the MPs could get there fast enough to arrest the guy before he left. As it turned out, they did; he lost his rifle and paid a hefty fine. As far as I was concerned, it served him right.

My experience that morning was hardly unique. Turkey season where I lived was known for hunters hearing a sound and shooting before identifying their target. Occasionally they'd end up "bagging" each other instead of the bird.

Since it's no fun to be on either end of the barrel when an accident happens, here are some tips to keep you safe this hunting season:

- Never shoot at a movement, sound or what you assume to be fur or feathers. Ensure you can clearly see and identify the animal you intend to shoot, including the correct body part for a kill shot. If you're not 100 percent sure, don't shoot.
- Before pulling the trigger, take a moment to look beyond the animal to ensure your shot won't endanger others should you miss or your bullet pass through the animal.

- Use the appropriate weapon for the game you're after and the area in which you're hunting. Some areas are restricted to shotguns because their relatively short range reduces risks to others who may be hunting in the same area. Illegally using a rifle in such areas puts others at great risk.
- Always wear a sufficient amount of blaze orange when and where it's required so you'll be visible to other hunters.
- Turkey and waterfowl hunters aren't required to wear blaze orange because it would hinder their ability to lure game within range. However, it's a good idea for turkey hunters to wear a blaze orange cap when moving through the woods between setups just in case other hunters are in the area. Also, most turkey vests have a stowed blaze orange panel that can be used when moving through the woods.
- Carry your decoys (or harvested game) in a bag to reduce the risk of other hunters mistaking them for live animals. Never carry an animal such as a deer over your shoulders through the woods because a hunter may fire, mistaking it for a live animal. To be safe, drag larger animals out.
- When hunting turkeys, never wear red, white or blue (such as an American flag patch/emblem) as these are the same as the male gobbler's head — the kill shot when taking turkeys.
- As you stalk game, be aware your stealthy movements may sound like those of an animal to another hunter. Pause every now and then to observe the area around you for other hunters in tree stands or ground blinds. If you see another hunter, show some blaze orange — especially if you're in full camouflage hunting turkeys — so he or she can see you, and then move out of the area. When wearing camouflage, avoid waving to other hunters as they could mistake your movements for something else.
- Good communication and coordination are important when hunting with others. Ensure everyone in the hunting party is aware of each other's movements at all times.
- When hunting on public lands or where there is little control over individual hunters, pay attention to the little details. Note how many other vehicles are parked near the area you intend to hunt. If there are too many other hunters in the area, find another location. This is especially important if you haven't made prior agreements with those other hunters. Since you don't know whether they're safety conscious, it's better to err on the side of caution.
- Take notice of the litter you find. Empty beer cans and whiskey bottles are a sign you may be in an area where irresponsible people are hunting. Find a safer place to hunt and report such findings to game wardens or other authorities.

For more information on hunting safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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